THE DIVISION SKANDERBEG AND YUGOSLAVIA NR. 3

Laid out below is a comprehensive analysis of the specifics of the "21. Waffen-Gebirgs Division der SS Skanderbeg". This subject's elucidation also utilized Albanian archival data presented by Shaban Sinani in his publication in the Albanian language, "Jews in Albania: The Presence and Salvation, Naimi, Tirana, 2009". This study has become necessary due to an oscillation in the "number of Jews deported or victimized in Kosova by Division Skanderbeg", as reported in different authors' publications. The swing itself is a corroboration of the lack of comprehensive research in the Albanian archives and Division Skanderbeg's full story. It mingles with the perspectives of some authors who spend sleepless nights propagandizing against Albanians and anything Albanian. Such authors have assigned the "deeds" of Division Skanderbeg outside the time limits of its existence and have deliberately speculated with photographs for Division Skanderbeg.

The German, Italian and Hungarian Armies invaded Yugoslavia Nr. 2 in April 1941. From then until November 1944, some Albanian areas that had been previously taken away from Albania and given to Yugoslavia Nr. 1 joined Albania. Those areas were the central and southern Kosova, western Macedonia, south and southeastern Montenegro. Only the Southern Albanian province of Çamëria (occupied by Greece in March 1913) did not become part of Albania yet throughout WWII. It remained under the authority of the Greek government in Athens.

Relying on the intelligence work from former Yugoslav consulates in Albania, the Yugoslav communist emissaries set up on 8 November 1941 a front organization known as the Communist Party of Albania (CPA). The seeds that Yugoslav communist envoys planted in Albania and the intelligence networks they established in the open until 1948 were so malicious that their fruits and buds even now leak poison and blood. On its side, the British WWII organization for "irregular warfare," known as the Special Operations Executive (SOE), operated in wartime Albania using British intelligence operations in pre-war Albania. The first group of British SOE officers entered Albania in late April 1943 and directly joined the partisan (communist) forces**.** In wartime Albania, the communist troops began gaining strength due to Yugoslav and British SOE emissaries' support and guidance. That assistance included continuous military supplies, weapons, clothes, training, communications, intelligence, air support, and money provided to them by British SOE.

On 2 August 1943, the Communist Party of Albania and the National Front (Balli Kombëtar) met at the village of Mukja concerning the continuation of the war against the occupying forces and the future of ethnic Albania. As advised, the CPA objected the inclusion of Kosova into Albania at the end of WWII. However, for the sake of unity, a compromise was reached by allowing the population of Kosova after the war to decide by referendum which to join. As a result of guidance from both Yugoslav and British SOE agents, the CPA denounced the agreement some days later and sealed the act in the 2nd Conference of the National Liberation Front on 4-9 September 1943 in Labinot. Then, immediately, the communist forces began attacking the National Front forces. After that, the nationalist parties and German Army had a common enemy: the communist forces.

In such an atmosphere of national disunity and betrayal, the Congress of the Second Albanian League of Prizren (2nd ALP) took place in Prizren from 16-19 September 1943. The Italian Army had just capitulated on 8 September 1943, and the 2nd ALP was against Nazi-Fascist occupiers. The 2nd ALP was on the same course as the First Albanian League of Prizren on 10 June 1878 – 1881, formed by Albanians representing all Albanian lands. The 1st ALP fought for the protection of Albanian territories and population against the decisions of the Congress of Berlin (13 June - 13 July 1878) and the attacks by neighbors directly helped by the Russian Empire. Due to restrictions in time, the organizers of the 2nd ALP were mostly from Kosova, Sanxhak, and Western Macedonia. The Albanian situation in 1944 was similar to that of 1878. The 2nd ALP had as the first article in its program the permanent unification of all Albanian regions and their protection by the use of arms. The head of the organizing council of the 2nd ALP, Musa Shehzade, condemned the atrocities committed in Albania by the Italian occupiers and acknowledged the Albanian political and armed resistance against that occupation. Then, he defined the German Army as an occupying force in transit and requested that it would benefit the Albanian national cause. Other speakers followed suit.

After the Italian Army capitulation on 8 September 1943, a provisional Albanian administration took the lead in Tirana. Its delegation is composed of Bedri Pejani, Rexhep Mitrovica, Xhafer Deva, Rrok Maloku, Xhelal Mitrovica, and Mazhar Sopoti, etc., who took part in the Congress of the 2nd ALP and delivered speeches. Rexhep Mitrovica underlined that the German occupation would end soon and called Albanians to be

prepared politically for the peace conference that would follow WWII. Tahir Zajmi brought fresh insight into how grave the danger came from Yugoslav factions, no matter what the political force they belonged to. He recalled the massacre carried out on 5 January 1943 by Serb-Montenegrin Chetniks when they scorched the localities of Bihor and Rozhajë in Montenegro and slaughtered 4700 Albanians of all ages. An appalling massacre occurred again in Bihor in May 1944. The Congress elected the Central Committee of the 2nd ALP with Chairman Rexhep Mitrovica, Deputies Musa Shehzade and Kolë Margjini, and active members Sheh Hasani, Asllan Boletini, Tahir Zajmi, and Qazim Bllaca. The first mandate of the Committee would be to establish an organized military force that was critical for the protection of Albanian lands and population.

On 16 October 1943, a National Assembly began in Tirana. It reestablished the Independence of Albania and declared a neutral Albania. On 8 November 1943, it elected Rexhep Mitrovica as the Prime-Minister of Albania. As a result of that, Bedri Pejani shifted to the Chairman of the 2nd ALP. Bedri Pejani, primarily a nationalist, also corresponded with Comintern. The Italian Army had Bedri Pejani jailed in the south of Albania, and he got released on 13 September 1943. Xhaferr Deva was the Internal Minister in the government of Albania between October 1943 and June 1944. The book "Rescue in Albania: One Hundred Percent of Jews in Albania Rescued from Holocaust, Brunswick Press, 1997" by Harvey Sarner elucidates his case. Xhaferr Deva refused to give the list of thousands of Jews to Nazis when they requested. He reminded them that such a request was interference to the internal affairs of Albania.

A meeting of Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill took place between 28 November and 1 December 1943 in Tehran, Iran. British and Soviet Armies had already occupied Iran between 25 August and 17 September 1941. Here, combined with Stalin's enthusiasm, Churchill made possible the first decision of the Tehran Conference to supply equipment and commando operations to aid the communist forces of Yugoslavia. On 24 May 1944, in direct consultation with Yugoslav emissaries and British OSE officers, the CPA held a Congress in Përmet with the same organizing model and purpose as the Communist Party Yugoslavia (CPY) did in Yugoslavia. It laid the foundations for future communist Albania, imitating what CPY in consultation with British OSE had done in Jajca, Bosnia, on 29 November 1943 [simultaneously with the Tehran Conference] for future communist Yugoslavia or Yugoslavia Nr. 3. Among other decisions, the Congress of Përmet announced that upcoming communist Albania would recognize the borders preceding the occupation by the Italian Army on 7 April 1939. For any nationalist, that declaration was the seal of national treachery by communists because all the Albanian lands chopped off in 1913 would be outside the Albanian border again.

A murky future was illuminating on the horizon with Yugoslav emissaries funneling the Albanian communists, under British OSE officers' patronage, against the Albanian national cause. The British Foreign Service brokered Yugoslavia Nr. 1 before WW1 and Yugoslavia Nr. 2 in 1929 [that ceased to exist in 1941], and then negotiated Yugoslavia Nr. 3 all through WWII. The first group of SOE agents was dispatched to ex-Yugoslavia on 20 September 1941. The British Foreign Secretary [and also Leader of the House of Commons] Robert Anthony Eden had declared in the House of Commons in December 1942 that after the Allied victory of the war, the independence of Albania would be recognized not beyond the borders of 1913 and even shearing its southern boundaries. Therefore, Albanians had to be held inside the edges before the Italian Army's invasion in April 1939, and all Albanian efforts for unifying Albanian provinces in one entity had to be shattered. The responsibility for implementing that policy flew to the British investment entities in Southeast Europe. The communist forces executed the task in Yugoslavia Nr. 3 and Albania, whereas the National Democratic Hellenic League (*EDES*, gr.) carried out the work in Çamëria, the Southern Albanian province occupied by Greece.

Between 31 December 1943 and 2 January 1944, the Kosova branch of CPY organized in Bujan of Gjakova a conference on the future of Kosova. British SOE officers attended and saluted the meeting that gathered representatives from all peoples and regions of Kosova. The Resolution of the Bujan Conference, signed by all delegates (43 Albanians and 6 Serbs and Montenegrins), recognized that Kosova had the right of self-determination by disjoining Yugoslavia and joining Albania. Without delay, both CPY and CPA central committees nullified that resolution. Another seen closed gate for the Albanian cause was the rejection of CPA cooperation and even betrayal to the Albanian forces and population in Çamëria.

Further, from collective intelligence and including Comintern channels through Bedri Pejani, the Albanian nationalists were also aware of the motives of the Soviet Union for helping the southern Slavs and moving 12 million Soviet soldiers (26 infantry Armies) into the heart of Europe. The events before and after the end of the bloody war confirmed their worries. Immediately after WWII ended for Kosova, and with Albanian

communist divisions' help, the Yugoslav communist divisions massacred 50'000 Albanians in Kosova, first those who were directly involved with the 2nd ALP. Their massacres did not differ from those reported by journalist Leo Freundlich in 1913 in his series "Albaniens Golgotha", at the time when Yugoslavia Nr. 1 was being brewed.

Hence, the 2nd ALP fervently needed support in the form of a strong military force for the sole intention of the defense of Kosova. However, the options and time for that purpose were too thin. The only solution was to establish a military force with the help of the German Army. The 2nd ALP assigned its Chairman Bedri Pejani to negotiate with German representatives for this. After intense negotiations, the German Army's conclusion was to form a Division of the SS named "Skanderbeg". The Waffen-SS would arm, feed, dress, train, and command it. Its order of formation was issued in Berlin on 17 April 1944. Bedri Pejani tried to convince Germans that 150'000 volunteers 18-24 years old would be ready to enlist in the Division Skanderbeg. The German authorities did not believe him because such a number was demographically impossible. In a communiqué on 5 May 1944, Herman Neubacher, the Reich III representative in the region, called Bedri Pejani "not a normal person" and noted, "the only intention of Albanians was to defeat Serbs and Montenegrins".

The Division Skanderbeg was one of the 44 divisions fielded during WWII as part of the Waffen-SS, out of which 28 were composed of non-German recruits. At the time when Division Skanderbeg began forming, there were already in operation three other Waffen-SS Divisions in ex-Yugoslavia filled with local recruits: "7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs Division Prinz Eugen" with a majority of German recruits from Vojvodina along with Serbs, Croatians, Hungarians, and Romanians, totaling 21120 men; "13. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS Handschar (Kroatische Nr. 1)" with 90% of recruits from Bosnia and 10% from Croatia, totaling 21065 men; and "23. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS Kama (Kroatische Nr. 2)" with recruits from Bosnia, totaling 2199 men. In Greece, the German Army engaged 22000 recruits from the defeated Greek Army and equipped, dressed, trained, and organized them in units known as the Security Battalions. Those were extensively involved in the Holocaust and fighting against Communist forces known as the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS).

SS-Brigadeführer Josef Fitzhum commanded the Division Skanderbeg from mid to end of April 1944. SS-Brigadeführer August Schmidthuber and his Deputy SS-Obersturmbannführer Alfred Graf commanded it from early May to early November 1944 when the Division Skanderbeg had the demobilization. Though Division Skanderbeg was under the complete authority and direct command of Waffen-SS officers, the heads of the 2nd ALP were hopeful of a military unit with Albanian soldiers on the ground to protect Kosova and ready for any eventualities that might arise after the war. However, things did not go as they wished.

In total, from April to November 1944, there were 11389 potential recruits, but more than half were not accepted due to their health conditions. As part of the agreement, 4000 Albanian prisoners (Bedri Pejani requested 8000) were released from the Dachau concentration camp for mobilization into Division Skanderbeg. They arrived in Prishtina on 10 May 1944. A few thousand German sailors from the "Kriegsmarine – Navy" who had lost their ships also became part of the Division Skanderbeg and constituted its trusted operational core. Less than 2000 Albanian recruits from "13. Waffen-Gebirgs Division der SS Handschar" in Bosnia were also pulled into Division Skanderbeg; these later deserted as did all other recruits. After Division Skanderbeg's disbandment, its remaining German soldiers and officers joined the "7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs Division Prinz Eugen".

The first military order "to care for the security of Kosova" was given to Division Skanderbeg on 29 April 1944. Units of Division Skanderbeg participated in fighting only in the military operation "Draufgenger" in Montenegro in July-August 1944. There is no document ordering Division Skanderbeg to conduct arrests (including those of May-June 1944), deportations, or killings. Division Skanderbeg was yet in the recruitment and formation process in May 1944, and 4000 emaciated Albanians had just arrived on 10 May 1944 in Prishtina from Dachau concentration camp intending to enlist in Division Skanderbeg. Those 4000 Albanians required thousands of Albanian guards to be managed militarily and friendly for joining Division Skanderbeg.

Throughout its existence, Albanian recruits' desertions were commonplace and constituted the leading cause for the demobilization of Division Skanderbeg. Its units were not stable enough to complete training and become operational. In a report dated 30 June 1944, Herman Neubacher wrote: "SS forces (not the Albanian authorities) are trying to recruit Albanians into Division Skanderbeg". In early September 1944, Division Skanderbeg had 6491 volunteers - indeed volunteers because most of them never ventured from their homes. By the end of September 1944, desertions brought the number to 3994 recruits, some of whom were even unarmed. In a report dated 2 October 1944, Herman Neubacher called the formation of this Division a terrible mistake,

because, as he wrote, "…they [Albanians] do not know any discipline. They only register for taking the arms that adore a lot and then go away with them to their homes…".

Referring to www.axishistory.com, the date of formation of the "XXI. Gebirgs-Armeekorps" as part of "2. Panzerarmee" was 25 August 1943, and its first Order of Battle came on 5 September 1943. Only the following three Orders of Battle reveal Division Skanderbeg and its actual situation:

Order of Battle (15 May 1944)
XXI. Gebirgs-Armeekorps
2. Regiment "Brandenburg"
181. Infanterie-Division
297. Infanterie-Division

Order of Battle (15 June 1944)
XXI. Gebirgs-Armeekorps
2. Regiment "Brandenburg"
SS-Polizei-Regiment 5 (in Serbia)
Feldkommandantur 1040 (in Montenegro)
181. Infanterie-Division
297. Infanterie-Division
21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Skanderbeg" (Albanische Nr. 1) (forming)

Order of Battle (15 July 1944)
XXI. Gebirgs-Armeekorps
2. Regiment "Brandenburg"
181. Infanterie-Division
297. Infanterie-Division
21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Skanderbeg" (Albanische Nr. 1) (forming)

Order of Battle (31 August 1944)
XXI. Gebirgs-Armeekorps
181. Infanterie-Division
297. Infanterie-Division
21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Skanderbeg" (Albanische Nr. 1) (forming)

In the Order of Battle on 15 May 1944 and prior, Division Skanderbeg did not exist. In the Order of Battle on 28 September 1944 and afterward, the Division Skanderbeg had already ceased to exist. As seen, Division Skanderbeg was continually in a state of "being formed", and as such, it was militarily unreliable. In early November 1944, Division Skanderbeg saw the dissolution.

There is an original German Army document, dated 13 July 1944, which states in one small paragraph only: "The SS-Div., between 28 May and 5 July 1944, arrested 510 Jews, communists, helpers of partisans and suspicious persons in political respect. They were taken into custody in Division's prisoner camp and 249 of them transported to Germany for labor". This document does not explicitly refer to Division Skanderbeg. Also, by definition, an "SS Division" was made up of Germans or other Germanic peoples, while a "Division of the SS" was made up of non-German recruits.

According to the records in "The House of the Wannsee Conference" (www.ghwk.de/poln/katpol8.htm), it is written: "The German XXI Corps arrested 510 persons in May 1944". Here, it says the "XXI Corps" and not the "21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS Skanderbeg". The Orders of Battle show that the "XXI Corps" had no Division Skanderbeg in its Order of Battle of May 1944, and other units of "XXI Corps" handled the arrests. In the Order of Battle on 15 June 1944, two more experienced groups were part of the "XXI Corps", while Division Skanderbeg was still under formation.

The arrested persons waiting for transportation by train can be checked by name, birthday, place of arrest, job, date of arrest, and cause of seizure on the original documents known as the "Transportenliste" of August 1944. The "Transportenliste" has been published for the first time in the book "Jews in Albania: The

Presence and Salvation, Naimi, Tirana, 2009" by Shaban Sinani. The "Transportenliste" can be consulted either in this book or at the Central Archive of Albania under the reference "Fund 153, the Year 1944, Dossier 172, Pages 10-38". All through its existence, the Division Skanderbeg received no orders to arrest or kill anyone, including Jews, because though it was under total Waffen-SS command, it was not reliable or ready for operations. It was assigned primarily to guarding duties to mineral mines and once its trusted operational core took part in combat against ex-Yugoslav communist forces in Montenegro. Therefore, the only orders it received were the following orders for guarding 801 persons transported by train from Prishtina to Sajmishte near Beograd. The date for the rule of implementation was 18 August 1944. The information about the "Transportenliste" follows:

List	Date of writing the list	Transportation Date	Total persons	Jews
List I	09.08.1944	18.08.1944	238	1
Annex I to List I	13.08.1944	No date	13	0
List II	09.08.1944	18.08.1944	249	40
List III	05.08.1944	18.08.1944	151	0
List IV	09.08.1944	18.08.1944	150	1
Total			801	42

Of the 42 Jews noted on the lists, two Albanian women recorded as "Ihr Man ist Jude – Her husband is Jewish", two appeared as "Sohn - Son" and three as "Tochter – Daughter". Thus, there were only 35 Jews in the "Transportenliste" of August 1944. The rest were communists, partisans and supporters, bandits and political opponents, Albanians, and ex-Yugoslavians. Of the 42 Jews, only six were resident Jews living in Kosova before April 1941. The lists also indicate that the arrests of the 801 persons had been made in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosova, Macedonia, and inner Albania, and covering a period from May 1942 to August 1944. Also, the arrests had been general regarding persons, location, and time. Most of the arrests took place in June-July 1944, which was when the German Army was conducting significant military operations throughout wartime Albania and surrounding countries.

The Division Skanderbeg neither took part in the Holocaust nor was it intended to do so. The German Army accepted its formation as a fighting force against partisan (communist) units. The 2nd ALP leaders expected it to become a military force in training, capable of being used after the war to protect Albanian lands and population. Both plans failed to materialize during the existence of Division Skanderbeg. Moreover, the Albanian administration had no command or authority over the fragile Division Skanderbeg. After the German Army occupied all Kosova in September 1943, it was entirely unsafe for Jews to live there. The years of war had shown them a safer place, and Jews had already been relocated there: to inner Albania.

Arm-Patch Insignia of 21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS Skanderbeg.

Cuff Title of 21. Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS Skanderbeg.

Left to right: Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill on the verandah of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran during the Tehran Conference.